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CATULLUS VS. HORACE.

BY WILLIAM EVERETT

TO those who were studying Latin poetry in England forty years ago, and who now, like Cicero and Atticus, are beginning to hear the foot "*aut jam impendentis, aut certe adventantis senectutis*," there are two teachers' names which shine with a peculiarly mellow lustre, John Conington and Hugh Munro. They were very different, — as different as two Britons can well be. Scotland and Lincolnshire, Shrewsbury and Rugby, Cambridge and Oxford, were the contrasted influences which had trained two natures more radically unlike than the most variant of these pairs. It is only a proof of the unexhausted wealth of Classical literature, and especially of Latin poetry, that it should have afforded labor for a lifetime — labor unwearied and enthusiastic — to two such different men.

In one thing, as all their pupils well knew, they were alike. The authors to which they gave their lives were as real to them as the authors of their own land. Virgil abode in Conington's heart as truly as Shakespeare; Catullus was as living a man to Munro as Burns. That astounding fallacy, that Latin and Greek are dead languages, never stood out in its native absurdity more clearly than in the teaching of those men.

It was almost inevitable that they should review each other's publications. Most certainly, if they were not competent to this work, there was no third man in England more so. Accordingly, Munro having reviewed the first volume of Conington's Virgil in 1860, Conington reviewed Munro's Lucretius in 1864. In the course of this criticism — in the Edinburgh Review — he raised a question on the comparative poetic force of the Ciceronian and Augustan ages — Lucretius and Catullus as opposed to Virgil and Horace. Munro took up this subject in his second edition; Conington replied in an Oxford lecture; and Munro said his last word at the end of his book on Catullus in 1878. Conington's part of the controversy will be found in the first volume of his Miscellanies, where he quotes entire all that Munro had yet written.

The thesis which Conington steadily maintained, and which Munro as steadily combated, was that the poetic art of the Augustan poets is superior to that of their predecessors. It is hard to say of such a powerful intellect as Munro's that he failed to understand this proposition; and yet we are reduced to that alternative, unless we hold that understanding it he deliberately chose to shift the ground of discussion. Munro was a master of dialectic fence. In the days of the Scholastic philosophy he would have beaten Conington out of the field; and like all dialecticians, from Socrates down, he had no great aversion to an *ignoratio elenchi*. At all events, he carried the discussion, as far as Catullus and Horace went, into the question which of them had the greatest natural inspiration, the most penetrative and ardent poetic genius, and this he made almost synonymous with passion. When he has contrasted Lesbia, the living object of Catullus's *odium et amor* with Lalage, "not a girl with a flesh and blood heart beneath her ribs at all, but a mere doll stuffed with sawdust," he claims to have settled the question of whether "*Ille mi par*" is superior to "*Integer vitæ*."

A student of 1870 can hardly expect one of these days to take a lively interest in the discussions between his old teachers. Nor is it necessary to use so much "local coloring;" the controversy belongs to this day also: the Munrovan side of it has been maintained by Professor R. Y. Tyrrell in his book on the Latin poets, published in 1895. His judgment on the case *Catullus vs. Horace* comes to the same thing: — Catullus's lyrics are more truly the utterance of spontaneous passion; therefore they are better poetry than Horace's, which are a painful patchwork from the remnants of Greek looms.

Now it seems to me there is a really vital question at issue here; a question which does not lose its interest with 1864, or 1894. Indeed Professor Tyrrell quotes Goethe on his side, and whatever Goethe discussed is likely to be of permanent interest. As long as poetry is recognized to be a work of mingled art and genius, each modifying the other, so long will it be worth while to enquire into the relations of two such widely known authors as Catullus and Horace.

One side of the contention is so plainly put in Professor Tyrrell's book — which is very largely digested from Munro's — that I need not copy from a treatise easily accessible. The counter thesis of Conington, which he tells us he found it difficult to formulate even to himself, I

should state somewhat as follows :—Catullus, one admits, is the poet of passion ; “the glow of the breast thrilled him in sweet youth and sent him wildly into swift iambics,” and other metres too. To portray his own passions, and occasionally those of others, he employs a vast variety of metrical forms, many of them never attempted in Latin before. In this employment, he consults his passion and that only ; he either cannot or will not consider whether there is any other spirit in the universe which it behoves a poet to take account of. He is a law to himself in poetic construction ; or rather it is his law to have no law. Now if he is only writing for himself,—if his lyrics and iambics are merely Catullus speaking to Catullus and his friends, we may fairly say he has a right to compose as he will. But as soon as he not only writes but publishes,—as soon as we come to give him his place on the ridge of Parnassus, we must hold him amenable to laws which are as old as Homer. Macaulay speaks of Catullus, in a passage which Munro quotes with high approval, as intensely Greek. But he is one thing that no Greek, while writing seriously, ever was,—he is ἀκόλαστος ; there is one Greek virtue he obviously lacks,—σωφροσύνη, or if one prefers, ἐγκράτεια. He seems to put self-control as completely out of account in his poetry as he would put a cretic out of account in a hexameter verse. He is nothing if not passionate,—and passion assuredly is not an Hellenic trait.

On the contrary, I assert that Horace, whatever coldness, or unreality,—Professor Tyrrell calls it insincerity—there may have been in him, did respect the laws of poetic art. He recognized that in an ode, as much as in a Doric temple, there was the need of self-restraint, σωφροσύνη—of suppression, omission, composition, in order to make the verses do their utmost, and that as it should be done. Professor Tyrrell believes, following Munro, that he had no passion to let out,—that he, being only a bee, had no swan's or eagle's flight to check. Perhaps ; but our contention is that in art a bee may degenerate into a wasp, a swan into a goose, and an eagle into a vulture, if no temper but the sating of their own instincts governs their flight. We contend that Horace drew honey even from pools and carcases where Catullus found nothing but garbage and carrion.

If the phrase “the laws of poetic art” seems undefined, let us say simply “the law,” meaning thereby self-control, σωφροσύνη, itself.

Every true artist must recognize this principle, that there is something above his own instinct and passion; and although no one law, and no ten laws are applicable to every case, though it is his duty as well as right to apply specific restraints to specific cases, some restraint he always must apply, for the sake of the restraint itself.

This is of course the old question between *morale* and *technique*: need the artist have a conscience? And my contention is that he must at least have an artistic conscience. It may be true, as Catullus urged, that a loose poet may be a pure man. But to my eye and ear Catullus is guilty not only of personal but of poetic impurity. It is not whether he sincerely loved Lesbia, whereas Horace only pretended to love Lydia; it is not whether in his Epithalamium he paints a more touching union than Horace does in *Carm.* 2, xiii, but it is whether he has purged his picture of every thing which needs the excuse of sincerity and tenderness to make up for its raw colors, harsh outlines and ill-balanced composition.

It may be the case that morality or immorality does not enter into the question; that if Catullus's love for Lesbia is better told than Cowper's love for Mary, we must not ask if they stand at the two extremes of purity and impurity. But Catullus's love, pure or impure, was a selfish one, and if he tells it as selfishly as he feels it, he violates his poetic duty to the world in whose stock of delineated passion he seeks to deposit it. Cowper wrote with the same absolute sincerity that Catullus did; he despised and flung to the winds every fantastic and unreal poetic convention of his day. But he composed his poetry under the same sense of responsibility that he did his life, and without the fanaticism. The same man who could make a heroic stand against the prevalent idolatry of Pope bowed in reverence before the divinity of Milton. I aver that if Catullus could have lived to read Horace he might have learned something, not in the passion of loving, but in the art of writing, and the philosophy of this assertion is here: — whoever gives way to the selfish expression of his own emotion is sure to say things which others will find (*a*) unintelligible, (*b*) tedious, (*c*) flat, (*d*) repulsive. Every one of these faults is perfectly compatible with sincerity. To explain, to condense, to omit, and to soften are all forms of the grand principle of sacrifice or self-control.

To compare poem with poem, and show where Horace or Catullus is superior in artistic management was attempted by Conington, but not very successfully. Munro on his side did the same thing in greater detail; but, I cannot help saying, unfairly. He insisted on using select stanzas of Catullus as if they were average passages. Now Conington had protested against judging the Republican poets by the standard of select passages, because, as he maintained, one of their essential defects in poetic art was their inequality,—they suddenly rise to a very remarkable height, and then drop to a dead level, and sometimes to a base profound. He mentions a striking instance of this inequality in a much lauded line of Lucretius (V. 745) *Altitonans Voltumnus et Auster fulmine pollens*, remarking on the utter flatness of the companion line *Inde aliae tempestates ventique sequuntur*.

Munro selects for comparison Catullus xxxiv with Horace *Carm.* 1, xxi, and sets off these two stanzas against each other:

Montium domina ut fores
Silvarumque viréntium,
Saltuumque reconditorum
Amniumque sonantum.

Vos laetam fluviis et nemorum coma
Quaecumque aut gelido prominet Algido,
Nigris aut Erymanthi
Silvis aut viridis Cragi.

and justly claims very great superiority for the former. It is a very magnificent stanza. If Catullus had always written like it, he would have had few equals in the art of poetry of a certain strain—eminently musical, dignified and suggestive, though somewhat in the monotone. But he did not always write like it,—and in this very poem not one of the other five stanzas is anything but commonplace.

The ode of Horace is not a specially good one. The metre which he uses with so much effect in 1, v; 1, xiv; 3, vii; 3, xiv, because he allows the verses to play into each other, is here tied down to a precise stanza to which it is very far from being as well adapted as the Alcaic or Sapphic. But from the beginning to the end of the sixteen lines it

is sustained and subjected to some constructive principles. The hymn of Catullus runs on to twenty four lines, and might as far as one can see "extend from here to Mesopotamy." In Horace's ode, girls and boys have each their appropriate deity to celebrate; in Catullus's no one very clearly sees what the boys have to do with Diana at all. "*Notho lumine*" is a strangely astronomical and utterly un-Latin description of the light of the moon, inevitably recalling, not to its own advantage, the glorious name of "*Siderum regina bicornis*." The respective final stanzas, which naturally stand off against each other, are in neither case of great poetic force; but the specific application of the prayer to the impending danger of Rome is to my mind much more poetic than the vague wish for the nation of Romulus, granting that Catullus is somewhat more sonorous. But there is one point wherein it seems to me Catullus shows the inherent want of nobility in his poetic nature, a sordidness which Horace steadily pushed away from him since the day of the Epodes. It was of course to be expected that a hymn to Diana should mention Latona. This Horace does in two lines, which suggest in five noble words the paramount distinction of the great Titanid above all the other partners of Jupiter, even Juno or Ceres: — "*Latonamque supremo dilectam penitus Jovi*." Catullus on the other hand insists on coupling this exalted parentage with an incident which cannot but be painful and which he will make repulsive: "*O Latonia maximi magna progenies Jovis, quam mater prope Deliam deposivit olivam*." There is in these last two lines to me an earth-born note — "a squealing of the wry-necked fife," which refuses to be drowned in the glorious organ swell of the next stanza.

But, as Munro says, the Glyconics of Catullus are grouped so differently from those of Horace that the odes in these metres can hardly be compared. And yet the task is still harder in the other odes. Horace has no Phalaeceans, no Scazons, and no Elegiacs; Catullus has no Alcaics, nor one of Horace's epodic metres. The only metre they have both handled is the Sapphic, in which Catullus has only two odes to Horace's twenty six. Conington succeeded but imperfectly when he compared "*Ille mi par esse*" and "*Integer vitae*." Munro has suggested a comparison between Catullus xi and Horace 2, vii. But he stopped short where a further examination would not have helped the case.

I print Catullus xi at length for purposes of analysis :

Furi et Aureli, comites Catulli
Sive in extremos penetrabit Indos,
Litus ut longe resonante Eoa
Tunditur unda,

Sive in Hyrcanos Arabasque molles
Seu Sacas sagittiferosque Parthos
Sive qua septemgeminus colorat
Aequora Nilus.

Sive trans altas gradietur Alpes
Caesaris visens monimenta magni
Gallicum Rhenum, horribilem fretum, ulti-
mosque Britannos, —

Omnia haec quodcumque feret voluntas
Caelitum tentare simul parati
Pauca nuntiate meae puellae
Non bona dicta : —

Cum suis vivat valeatque moechis,
Quos simul complexa tenet trecentos,
Nullum amans vere sed identidem omnium
Ilia rumpens ;

Nec meum respectet, ut ante, amorem
Qui illius culpa cecidit velut prati
Ultimi flos, praetereunte postquam
Tactus aratro est.

(In line 11, *Gallicum Rhenum, horribilem fretum ulti-*, the reading *fretum* is my own conjecture. As *fretus* is a rare word (see Lucretius vi, 364) *aestum* was written over it to explain it, and *horribile aestu ulti-* became *horribiles ulti-*. If any one prefers *aequor* (Haupt) *salum* (Munro) or *insulam* (Ellis) the argument is unaffected.)

The first thing that strikes one, in the artistic construction of *Furi et Aureli*, is its curiously disproportionate and unconnected character. The largest half of it is an expansion of the simple words *comites*

Catulli; the field over which *Furius* and *Aurelius* will attend him is made to occupy the whole world, in the remotest parts of Asia, Africa and Europe, nation after nation being enumerated; then suddenly he changes, and assigns to these friends, who are ready to share anything the gods send him, a disagreeable commission in his behalf. This commission is to speak to his mistress the most insulting words conceivable, puffing the prostitute away with a blast of sulphureous contempt. The sort of friendship *Catullus* had for *Furius* and *Aurelius* appears from his other poems extremely equivocal, and one cannot say positively whether he means to address them as devoted friends who will stand by him in a terrible necessity, or as toadies whom he can properly call upon for the meanest services.

If passion is all we need for an ode, it is certainly there in the last three stanzas with a witness. *Catullus* is so bent on inflicting a wound on the insolent, ungrateful and false *Lesbia*, that he uses a weapon not merely barbed and poisoned but malodorous. His indignation, his contempt, his mingled frost and fire, *odi et amo*, have carried him, as they did *Dante*, beyond the bounds of physical decency. His fifth stanza is nasty, and being nasty, it is unfit for poetry.

I propose now to set against this ode two of *Horace's*, in both of which the same metre is used, and in both, as I conceive, *Catullus xi* was in the poet's mind. In *Septimi Gades* (*Carm.* 2, vii) *Horace* takes up the idea of a devoted friend who will travel anywhere with him. This conception is pressed in one stanza instead of three, enough to make it clear and not tedious; on this he builds up a thoroughly appropriate structure—what place shall the two friends select as their home, where they shall live in peace, and the survivor shall bury the first to fall with pious tears? First, he casts a wistful gaze at *Tibur*, the special resort of luxurious Romans, where every one wanted to go; rejecting that, as denied by an unjust fate, he expatiates on the charms of *Tarenium*, and winds up with a gentle look to the day, never out of his mind, when he shall cease to live anywhere.

Of course there is no passion here; there is nothing deeper or stronger than sober friendship and gentle longing. *Catullus* draws on a string of his heart till it almost snaps, and flies back again in agonized vibrations, which make ours ring with something like the same agony—not at all in real sympathy, but wrung from them by the cruel compulsion

of his transcendent selfishness. Horace only touches a chord to which there instantly sounds an according note in every heart of man,—unknown to none, but sounding richer, deeper, sweeter as the heart in which it vibrates is more refined, more cultivated, more dependent on the company of books, of nature and of men. Catullus calls loud to all mankind to come and hear his song of self-torture; Horace gently invites all his brother men to share in his modest hopes. There is the same difference that there is between the demands of a highwayman and of the agent of a charity; one is indifferent to what we think of him provided he gets our money, the other would have us for his friend, even if we refuse him. I believe Horace shows the truer art in handling the subject.

And I believe this is shown in another way. Each poet mentions half a dozen places, or nations, and says something about each. Every one must judge for himself which does this most to his satisfaction. To me Catullus's catalogue is for the most part fearfully prosaic, and Horace's full of imagination and association. If, as I believe, the allusion to Caesar's achievements is bitterly ironical, the phrase *Cantabrum indoctum ferre juga nostra* touches the same note, that the Romans were not always invincible, with much greater truth and delicacy than *Gallicum Rhenum*, etc.

And so of the mere metrical construction; Munro dwells on the magnificent roll of "*Litus ut longe resonante Eoa tunditur unda*." It is grand,—it takes hold of the ear and will never leave it; it is no doubt in a richer strain than "*Barbaras Syrtes, ubi Maura semper aestuat unda*." Not that Horace's lines are feeble or harsh; but Catullus's are wonderful. But there the strain ends. It is all through,—and it affects us in much the same way as the one we have just noted in xxxiv. Where Munro discovers any richness or sweetness in the stanza about the memorials of Caesar is hidden from me. But Horace's ode is melodious and tender throughout; there is not a harsh line in it, and one stanza is to me the very perfection of rhythm and melody:

Ver ubi longum, tepidasque præbet
Juppiter brumas, et amicus Aulon
Fertili Baccho minimum Falernis
Invidet uvis.

Surely the long spring and the mild winter which Jove grants to the realm of Phalanthus have poured into these exquisite lines something of the same sweetness and spirit which swells in the clusters of Aulon.

Of the second part of Catullus's ode the first stanza seems to me simply flat, and the second disgusting. Munro pronounces the last stanza to be extremely poetical, introducing the metaphor of the flower cut down by the plough. It is used again in lx (lxii), is copied by Virgil, *Aen.* ix, 435, and expanded into a whole poem in Burns's "Mountain Daisy," though it is almost inconceivable that Burns should have been indebted to Catullus, or even to Virgil. But Burns and Virgil, and Catullus himself in lx (lxii) give it a grace which is wholly wanting in xi, by associating it with the untimely lopping of a youth's life or a maiden's honor. In xi it is simply Catullus's own passion which has fallen a prey to the steely heart of Lesbia, and if she does not care, why should anyone else, except a very few Furi and Aurelii, who are in the same league of lust? Mr. Munro compares Catullus to Burns, which is a Scotchman's way of saying that he is only one step removed from ideal perfection. But Burns possessed, and his "Mountain Daisy" shows it, exactly what Virgil possessed and Catullus did not; human sympathy. The Fenelons and Macaulays who declare that Catullus moves them to tears, may be perfectly certain he never would have shed one tear for them.

In more than one poem Horace deals with the conception of casting off a faithless mistress; but he does it nowhere with such effect as in *Carm.* i, xxv. The gradual dropping away of the once tumultuous lovers, — the cessation of the tender cry, — the lonely and darkling watch in the storm-swept alley, — the festering passion smarting deeper as it grows more hopeless, — and all wound up by an entirely appropriate and finished comparison, certainly form a most artistic bit of composition, whether we believe this Lydia to be equally genuine with Lesbia, or a bodiless and soulless name.

Now of this poem lines 9-10 recall Catullus xi and lviii, and recall them without presenting the obtrusive nastiness of the original. But now follow lines 11-16, where Horace puts his merciless knife into Lydia's very vitals, to "anatomize Regan and see what breeds around her heart." He is just as picturesque as Catullus — but he is σῶφρων, — he is ἐγκρατής, — and consequently we are not treated to the

unpoetical Latin realism which attained its maximum perhaps in Lucan's sacrifice, sorceress and serpents. Yet Horace was not without an inclination that way. Epode v has plenty of the charnel-house about it, to say nothing of viii and xii. But he learned at last the limitations of his art; and he learned that sincerity of feeling and heat of passion do not of themselves make poetry.

The lyric poet who publishes his odes appeals to the world to sympathize with his emotions. The words, the imagery, the rhythm of his strain are the electric wire along which are transmitted the vibrations of his heart. This instrument no one poet invented; we can scarcely say that any one has patented improvements on it; but in any supposition it must be made and used according to the laws of human nature, to which even the electricity and magnetism of lyric feeling are subject, and to the laws of the great empire of poetry, wherein for us Homer is the undethroned autocrat. If any passion is so violent as to jar or snap the wire,—if it is so egotistical in its acids as to corrupt and befoul the strings through which it speaks, it must yield its preëminence of control over the feelings of other men to some one which does not speak with so much force, but does secure the sympathy for which it appeals by accommodating its very temper to the hearts it addresses.

Lightning is the most brilliant and forcible of electric phenomena, but it cannot be conveniently used to transmit messages of business or of affection. Catullus may blast us and leave the places smoking far and wide with sulphur, after we have seen his bright star hide itself in the forest; but Horace can talk to us as a man talks with his familiar friend.